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Biblical chronology reassessed and the seventh vial

Ralph Green

THERE HAVE been several attempts in the past to assess the progress of human history in relation to the plan and purpose of God, using Biblical records as much as possible. This article follows mainly the work of Brethren John Thomas and W. H. Carter, but with a few changes which are explained below. A suggestion is also made as to how the thousand years of Revelation 20 can be fitted into the seven thousand years that appear to have been the basic time-span of God's wonderful plan of redemption for this world. The main changes have to do with the age of Terah when Abraham was born and the relationship between the 400 years of Genesis 15:13 and the 430 years of Galatians 3:17.

Later we examine the vial periods of Revelation 16 and the position Christ and the saints will occupy during the seventh vial and beyond.

Terah's age at Abraham's birth

Terah's age when Abraham was born is stated to have been seventy years (Gen. 11:26). Brother W. H. Carter suggests that it was Haran who was born when Terah was this age, and that Abraham was not born till Terah was 131 (or 130), since Abraham is stated to have been seventy-five, not 135, when he left the city Haran on the death of Terah at the age of 205 (Gen. 11:31,32; 12:4; Acts 7:4).¹ Brother Thomas says that the death of Terah, and the removal of Abraham into the land of Acts 7:4, occurred when Abraham left the land of the Philistines for Mount Moriah (Gen. 21:34; 22:2), and that Terah was indeed seventy when Abraham was born.² In the chronological chart opposite Brother Thomas's view is followed.

Genesis 15:13 and Galatians 3:17

The time the Israelites were in Egypt is given in the chart as 195 years. The line of descent from Levi was Kohath, Amram, Aaron and Nadab (Ex. 6:16-23). Kohath is included in those going down into Egypt with Jacob (Gen. 46:11), with three generations therefore being born in Egypt. 195 years is not unreasonable for three generations, averaging sixty-five years each.

The object of this calculation is to harmonise the periods of 400 and 430 years given in Genesis 15:13 and Galatians 3:17 respectively. The 400 years is understood to have commenced at the time the Abrahamic covenant was made, as recorded in Genesis 15, and to have ended when Abraham's descendants left Egypt to return to the land of Canaan.

In Galatians 3:16-19 Paul distinguishes between "the law", meaning the Law of Moses, which was given about two months after the Exodus (Ex. 19:1), and the Abrahamic promises. In verse 16 he writes of promises in the plural. Promises were given on a number of occasions. The age of Abraham when the promises were first given is not stated.

Genesis 12:4 states that Abraham was seventy-five when he left Haran to go to the land of Canaan in compliance with God's command. Chapter 12 commences, "the LORD *had said* unto Abram", so the comprehensive promises detailed in the first three verses were evidently given when Abraham was living in Ur of the Chaldeans. To fit the 430 years of Galatians 3:17, it is

1. *Times and Seasons*, 1961, pp. 219-23.

2. *Chronikon Hebraikon*, 1939, p. 13.

Chronological chart

		AM	
Creation to the Flood		1656	Gen. 5
Duration of the Flood		1	
Flood to the birth of Terah	222		Gen. 11:10-26
Abraham born when Terah was 70	70	292	Gen. 11:26
Birth of Abraham to the first promise	55	55	Gen. 12:1-3
From promise to Abrahamic covenant	30		Gen. 15; Gal. 3:17
Covenant to birth of Ishmael (Abraham 86)	1		Gen. 16:15,16
To the birth of Isaac (Abraham 100)	14		Gen. 21:1-5
Jacob born when Isaac 60	60		Gen. 25:26
Jacob enters Egypt when 130	130		Gen. 47:9
Israel in Egypt to Exodus	195		
	430	430	Gal. 3:17
		2434	
From Exodus to fourth year of Solomon		480	1 Kgs. 6:1
		2914	
From fourth year of Solomon to first of Nebuchadnezzar*		406	
		3320	
From first year of Nebuchadnezzar to seventh of Artaxerxes*		148	Ezra 7:8,13,21
From seventh year of Artaxerxes to end of 70 times (490 years), ending A.D. 34 (see page 134)		490	Dan. 9:24
		3958	
From A.D. 34 to A.D. 2000		1966	
		5924	
The remainder to complete the full Divine week of 7,000 years		1076	
		7000	

* Using Brother W. H. Carter's calculation in *Times and Seasons*

assumed that Abraham was fifty-five when the promises were first made to him, and that this was thirty years before they were confirmed in the covenant of chapter 15.

The 480 years of 1 Kings 6:1

It may well be that Samson's judgeship of twenty years (Judg. 16:31), and possibly part of Eli's forty years (1 Sam. 4:18), continued under the shadow of the Philistine oppression of forty years (Judg. 13:1). This overlapping is suggested to account for the fact that 480 years is otherwise insufficient to accommodate the total of the various time periods given in Judges and 1 Samuel, and the other periods that have to be fitted in.

The Seventy Weeks Prophecy of Daniel 9

Another problem is that of when the seventy weeks (490 years) of Daniel 9:24 began. Brother Thomas says it was the twentieth year of Artaxerxes, king of Persia (Neh. 2:1), which he dates to 456 B.C.³ However, we believe the B.C. dates used by Brother Edmund Green in his book on Daniel⁴ are more correct, and these are used in the chart. There were at least three decrees made for the Jews to restore and build Jerusalem, and the one selected by Brother Green is the one made in the seventh year of Artaxerxes (Ezra 7:7,8,13), the year 457 B.C.

Calculating the 490 years of the prophecy from 457 B.C., we arrive at A.D. 34. Daniel 9:27 indicates that the crucifixion of Jesus would occur in the *midst* of the last week of years (during A.D. 30), when Jesus would have been about 33½ years of age, making his birth about 4 B.C.

Implications from the chart

According to the chart there are 1,076 years before the end of the 7,000-year 'week' of the Divine plan. This may at first sight look very discouraging. In reality it is not so. We are in fact very fortunate in having the unexpected but firm promise of Jesus in Revelation 16:15: "Behold, I come as a thief. Blessed is he that watcheth, and keepeth his garments [surely a figure of faithfulness], lest he walk naked, and they see his shame".

When is this event to be? You will notice that this amazing promise occurs almost at the end of the sixth vial period and, as Jesus has not yet come, we must still be living in the period of the sixth vial. Therefore the seventh vial has yet to be poured out, which will obviously take some time.

We may rightly be anxious for the thousand-year reign of Jesus and the saints to begin soon (Rev. 20:4). It is well to notice, though, that there are three longish chapters intervening between chapters 16 and 20, and we must consider this in relation to our hope that the Kingdom will start very soon. We need to think again about these chapters, especially chapter 16, in which the promise of the second advent of Jesus occurs.

A summary of the vials

This writer finds the interpretation of the vials of Revelation given by Brother Thomas in *Eureka*, and more briefly by Brethren Boulton and Barker in *Apocalypse and History*, very interesting and satisfying. We are here concerned with the chronology of this period, and, as Revelation 16 gives no time periods for the vials, we are left to ascertain these from history. Briefly they are as follows:

- 1 The sore (or ulcer) of the French Revolution, 1789-1792.
- 2 The sea becomes as blood, the war between France and England at sea, 1793-1805.
- 3 Rivers and springs become as blood, war in Central Europe, 1796-1799.
- 4 The sun scorches men with fire, the wars of Napoleon in Europe, 1805-1807.
- 5 Darkness on the beast's throne, the eclipse of papal power, 1809-1815.
- 6 Drying up of the River Euphrates, the gradual diminishing of the Ottoman Empire, 1820-1917. Three unclean spirits gather the whole world to Armageddon, 1917-2000 plus.
- 7 The great earthquake. Future.

From the above it can be seen that the first five vials of God's wrath lasted from 1789 to 1815, a concentrated period of twenty-six years. Vial 6, however, has so far occupied 180 years, and is not yet completed. Vials 2 to 5 were fulfilled by the activities of Napoleon Bonaparte and his French army. He was victorious over most of his enemies, except the English, in the outpouring of God's wrath upon the Catholic world of Europe.

The sixth vial had to do with the Turkish Empire, which was established by invaders from the East, as prophesied by the sixth trumpet of Revelation 9. The Turks invaded across the Euphrates, and the name of this river is used in

3. *Ibid.*, p. 29.

4. *The Prophecy of Daniel*, The Christadelphian, 1988, p. 96.

Revelation 16:12 to identify this same power, which conquered Constantinople in 1453 and reached Vienna in 1683.

Its decline was gradual, its territory being lost little by little during the nineteenth century. It was not until 1917 that it lost Palestine and Mesopotamia, as it was then called, to the British. This war brought an end to its empire. The “water” of “the great river Euphrates . . . was dried up”, and its territory was reduced to the country we now call Turkey.

The three unclean spirits like frogs described in the latter part of the sixth vial arise from the democratic movements which are now rife in the world. These influence “the kings of the earth and of the whole world, to gather them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty” (16:14). This battle constitutes the seventh vial, which is briefly described in verses 17-21.

The rise of Israel

In the meantime, after the scattered Jews were invited by the British Government to make a national home for themselves in Palestine in 1917, they began to return in earnest. The Turks had been driven out, and the “desolate places” left behind were at that time inhabited by Arabs, now called Palestinians. Bible students realised that the many promises of restoration for Israel made by the prophets of the Old Testament were beginning to be fulfilled.

As might have been expected, disputes between Arabs and Jews flared up from time to time into bitter wars, and, rather than hindering the progress of colonisation by the Jews, actually resulted in significant gains. The State of Israel was proclaimed in the first of such wars in 1948. The antagonism between the Palestinians and the Jews still continues, after having been obscured to some extent by what was called ‘the peace process’.

Many nations are seriously concerned about the eventual outcome. The USA want a peaceful solution so that their access to Middle Eastern oil will not be jeopardised. Iran and some other Muslim nations want to see Israel removed from the map altogether. The pope wants to have his say regarding the future status of Jerusalem. Germany and the European Union generally do not recognise Jerusalem as the capital city of Israel. The future for Israel looks dark, and a major war looms large.

Zechariah 14 predicts just such a war, and also the sudden intervention in it by the Lord, to

rescue God’s people and God’s city from the hands of the invaders. This may well be the first task of the Lord on his return, supported by the angels (Mt. 25:31). It is evidently when the Lord Jesus reveals himself to Israel in these circumstances that they will want to be reconciled to their long-rejected Saviour and King.

The seventh vial

There are references linking with the seventh vial in other parts of Revelation. In 16:19 we read that “great Babylon came in remembrance before God, to give unto her the cup of the wine of the fierceness of His wrath”. In 14:18,19 we read of an angel being commanded: “Thrust in thy sharp sickle, and gather the clusters of the vine of the earth . . . And the angel . . . cast it into the great winepress of the wrath of God”.

Almost identical language is used in 19:15, this time identifying the agent by whom this punitive war is to be executed: “And out of his mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it he should smite the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron: and he treadeth the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God”. This is the Lord Jesus Christ, who leads the saints in this war: “And I saw heaven opened, and behold a white horse; and he that sat upon him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he doth judge and make war . . . And the armies which were in heaven followed him upon white horses, clothed in fine linen, white and clean” (vv. 11,14).

We conclude from these verses that by the time of the pouring out of the seventh vial the judgement of the saints will already have taken place, and those worthy will have been made immortal before being engaged in the conquest of the nations.

It is not until we reach chapter 20 that mention is made of the saints sitting on thrones, of the duties of judgement being committed to them, and of them reigning with Christ for a thousand years (v. 4)—in other words, the beginning of the seventh millennium. Is it not reasonable to suggest that the allocation of rulership to the saints is reserved for the time after Jesus and the saints have subdued the world? The seventy-six years which the chart shows provide time for this work of subduing the earth to take place.

The sequence of events

In both Zechariah 14:4 and Revelation 16:15 the return of Jesus is announced without any direct

reference to the resurrection and judgement of the saints. There is, however, a reference to these events in Revelation 11:18: "The nations were angry, and Your wrath has come, and the time of the dead, that they should be judged, and that You should reward Your servants the prophets and the saints, and those who fear Your name, small and great, and should destroy those who destroy the earth" (NKJV).

The overall order of events seems to be as follows:

- 1 The revelation of Jesus to Israel and his acceptance by them.
- 2 The judgement.⁵
- 3 Defeating a Catholic crusade.
- 4 Binding the dragon (Gog and Magog).

5. This subject was dealt with in "The Second Advent and the Resurrection", *The Testimony*, Sept. 1982, p. 271.

- 5 Establishing the thousand-year reign of Christ and the saints (Rev. 20:4,6).
- 6 The last rebellion, lasting "a little season".
- 7 The final judgement and the main harvest of immortals.

Conclusion

Returning finally to the promise of Jesus, "Behold, I come as a thief", in the closing stages of the sixth vial, we may not have long to wait for our dearest hopes to be realised. The announcement is brief but it means a great deal to those who have been enlightened by the Word of God. It means that the judgement seat of Christ will soon follow. After that comes the seventh vial, and the fulfilment of this will enable Jesus to become "King of kings, and Lord of lords" (Rev. 19:16) and the saints to reign joyfully with him on earth for a thousand years, to the glory of God.

Jubilee periods re-examined

Tony Benson

IN HIS BOOK *Times and Seasons* (published in 1961) Brother W. H. Carter put forward the view that there would be seventy cycles of forty-nine years each, based on the jubilees of Leviticus 25:8, culminating in the year prior to the beginning of the millennial reign of Christ. He calculated the cycle as ending in 1995/96,¹ the seventieth jubilee year since the occupation of the land, with the Millennium beginning in 1996/97.

Calculating forty-nine-year periods back from 1995/96, the following significant years emerge:

- 1946/47 Britain declares its intention to withdraw from Palestine, leaving the way clear for a Jewish state to be established
- 1897/98 First Zionist Congress
- 1848/49 Brother Thomas visits Britain to preach the Truth and writes *Elpis Israel*.

Whilst this sequence is impressive, it is difficult, looking back to 1995/96, to see what marked out that year as the completion of the sequence.

One possibility is that 1995/96 marked the end of the sixty-ninth cycle, and that the Millennium will begin in 2044/45. This does not place the return of Christ as far off as we might imag-

ine, given that there will be a lot to do before the Kingdom actually commences.

Alternatively, it may be that we should look again at the calculation of the jubilee year. A jubilee year occurred after a period of forty-nine years; it was the fiftieth year (Lev. 25:8,10). Was this fiftieth year the first of the next forty-nine year cycle? If so then jubilee years occur every forty-nine years as per the sequence above. The alternative is that the jubilee year stood on its own; there was a period of forty-nine years, then a jubilee year, then a period of forty-nine years, and so on. If this was the case then jubilee years occur every fifty years.

Let us suppose that jubilee years occur every fifty years. Is there a fifty-year pattern we can identify? The seventy forty-nine-year jubilee periods ending in 1995/96 are calculated from the date when Israel under Joshua had completed the conquest of the land, given as 1435/36 B.C. Seventy fifty-year cycles from that date bring us to 2066/67.² Working back we get the following:

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1. Years are shown this way to correspond to Jewish years, which run from autumn to autumn.
 2. $70 \times 50 = 3,500 + 1$ to compensate for the absence of a year zero.